



Designing and Implementing Evidence-Based Summer Learning in Texas: The Additional Days School Year (ADSY) Planning & Execution Program (PEP)

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) selected the Sperling Center for Research and Innovation (SCRI) and its parent organization BellXcel (BX) to provide technical assistance to participating districts in the Additional Days School Year (ADSY) Voluntary Summer Learning Planning & Execution Program (PEP). SCRI guides districts in developing comprehensive, evidence-based programs—sharing expertise, engaging and maximizing existing staff capacity, providing and developing tools and resources, and serving as thought partners and extra hands. As a result, districts are prepared to launch high-quality programs that align to TEA requirements and advance their district goals while engaging and inspiring students, families, and teachers.

THE BACKSTORY

In 2020, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) selected SCRI and BellXcel (SCRI/BX) to provide technical assistance to school districts and charter schools as part of a landmark education bill.

Texas House Bill 3, a sweeping and historic school finance bill passed in June 2019, provides half-day formula funding for school systems that add instructional days to any of their elementary schools starting in the 2020-2021 school year. Known as the Additional Days School Year (ADSY) program, this funding is available to increase total instructional days from 180 up to 210—an acknowledgement of the strong evidence around summer learning loss.

TEA identified two potential paths for districts and charter schools implementing ADSY: Voluntary Summer Learning and Full-Year Redesign. Campuses selecting Voluntary Summer Learning implement a traditional 180-day calendar and have up to 30 days for additional instruction and enrichment for a targeted subset of students or all students. Those selecting Full-Year Redesign develop a revamped 210-day school year and redesign the daily teacher and student experience.

To support robust planning, program design, and change management involved with adding instructional days, TEA launched the ADSY Planning and Execution Program (PEP) with support from philanthropy. Districts and charters applied to be part of the ADSY PEP pilot cohort, and TEA conducted a competitive process to select technical assistance vendors to support them in their design and planning. In recognition of its broad expertise in summer learning, SCRI/BX were selected as Voluntary Summer Learning technical assistance vendors in all four possible categories: design and implementation, academics, financial sustainability, and daily operations.

CASE STUDY APPROACH

“Launching a summer program is akin to starting a new school year, but with less time for planning and execution.” RAND, Getting to Work on Summer Learning

ADSY PEP districts are guided by a Strategic Plan template and Success Criteria that define a comprehensive and evidence-based program design and planning process. By working through the elements of the plan together, SCRI/BX ensure that districts engage the right people, tackle the big questions, and prioritize their time and resources. Nine ADSY PEP districts and charter schools selected SCRI/BX to support their work in the 2020-2021 cohort. Partnering districts and schools vary in size, strengths, and needs, yet our approach is consistent:

- **Build on strength:** Identify and leverage existing staff capacity, resources, and processes to maximize outcomes and experiences, bridge connections to the school year, and fill gaps.
- **Focus on evidence-based practices:** Design programs based on what works for the specific population served and the unique conditions of the summer. Build in continuous improvement processes.
- **Be practical:** Lean on SCRI and BellXcel’s 30 years of experience delivering comprehensive, evidence-based summer learning to design engaging programs and equip educators.
- **Account for scale:** Codify processes and procedures so they can be standardized, replicated, scaled, and sustained over time. Share ownership of planning among district stakeholders to prepare for changes in leadership.

Data indicate that BGCP was empowered to meet their community’s needs and ran high-quality, impactful programs. A BGCP leader noted BellXcel’s technical assistance model provided high-quality staff PD, flexible curriculum, meaningful quality visits, coaching, and resources. The technical assistance model guided BGCP and enabled staff to focus on instruction which ultimately supported youth academic and social-emotional growth.

“It has been extremely beneficial to have SCRI and BellXcel keeping an eye on our progress and giving us helpful tools and feedback in every step of the process. They have made the entire procedure more streamlined and less intimidating and have helped us establish stakeholder support by ensuring that we developed a Steering Committee with regular meetings. Now, members are beginning to make real contributions to the overall plan from their own area of expertise.” - Ambassador Prep Academy

KEY ADSY PLANNING TASKS

1. Engaging a Steering Committee

One of the first essential tasks for ADSY PEP districts is identifying the right group of people to collaboratively design and deliver a high-quality, sustainable program. Often described as a Steering Committee, these planning bodies look very different for large, multi-site district programs compared to programs operating at smaller rural or single charter school sites. Members may range from assistant superintendents and principals to operations and support staff to parent representatives. The Steering Committees are led by the ADSY project managers—the primary point person for each district or charter school summer learning program. Navigating the competing priorities and busy schedules of Steering Committee members is one of the most pressing challenges faced by ADSY project managers.

Spotlight — Ambassador Preparatory Academy: *The presence of a strong internal champion for the summer program helps to motivate and inspire others. For example, the Superintendent at Ambassador Preparatory Academy has taken a very personal interest in the success of the summer program. She sees it as an opportunity to not only help their students recover from a very challenging year, but as a way to brand their school as a leader in creating high-quality and evidence-based programs to support student learning. By taking the lead in assuring that each person on the Steering Committee is dedicated to the program, she has also shown that having the right decisionmakers at the table can make a huge difference in the ultimate success of the program.*

Once those decisionmakers are at the table, SCRI/BX act as an extra set of hands for project managers by taking on the heavy lift of developing agendas and organizing and facilitating the Steering Committee meetings and follow-up activities. Our skilled facilitators get the right people discussing and sharing the right information to drive intentional and equitable design.

Spotlight — Greenville ISD (GISD): *In GISD, frequent whole-group Steering Committee meetings just weren't possible, so it was necessary to keep the work moving between monthly meetings in a creative way. To clearly communicate ADSY program goals and get a greater sense of staff interests and areas of expertise, SCRI/BX facilitated 1:1 conversations with each committee member. Working closely with the GISD ADSY project managers, we developed goals, agendas, monthly topics and priorities for subcommittees, and compiled and organized ADSY materials so they were easily accessible and specific to subcommittee work. This prepared and empowered subcommittees to drive evidence-based design and planning steps with key stakeholders.*

“Working with SCRI and BellXcel has been fantastic! Our district would never have been able to complete such a fabulous comprehensive strategic plan on our own. It's like SCRI and BellXcel give you a puzzle with all the edges already in place, and then helps you figure out where each remaining piece goes. Their extensive knowledge has enabled us to create a research-based, comprehensive summer learning program that will meet all of our students' needs.” - Greenville ISD

2. Selecting Academic and Enrichment Curriculum

SCRI/BX use our deep knowledge of what works in academic and enrichment curricula and offerings to help districts identify and/or adapt curricula that meets the ADSY PEP requirements and matches student needs. Often, we support districts to re-envision their school-year curriculum and resources for a unique summer experience for both teachers and students. For districts interested in something new, we draw from our knowledge of available summer curricula. With either approach, the goal is always to maximize learning and outcomes, and prioritize fun and youth engagement. We developed an enrichment planning tool to help guide districts through the sometimes-challenging process of developing a cohesive enrichment program that supports its overall goals.

Spotlight — Synder ISD (SISD): *SISD benefits from having experienced after-school and summer program administrators responsible for implementing the ADSY program. SCRI/BX worked with those program managers to identify where they could strengthen their existing programs in alignment with recent research in summer learning. Together, we built a planning committee that included both campus supervisors and the elementary curriculum specialist to choose a new curriculum. SCRI/BX helped to facilitate discussions on the critical components of a new curriculum and helped to narrow down the potential summer curriculum choices. Because of our guidance and collaboration with the program administrators, SISD selected a researched-based curriculum specifically designed for summer learning experiences that also supports the district's priority social and emotional learning (SEL) attributes for students.*

“The partnership we have formed with SCRI and BellXcel has offered much more than expected. Their dedicated team has helped us rethink logistics and planning, and provided strategic plan review/writing support. The Steering Committee training, professional development, and summer-specific curriculum support has helped SISD achieve a higher-level understanding and knowledge to offer a more comprehensive Summer Enrichment Program for our students.” - Synder ISD

PREPARING FOR DATA COLLECTION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

ADSY PEP districts are expected to meet certain requirements for data collection and continuous improvement. Based on our experience, SCRI/BX offer districts practical knowledge along with expertise to effectively set realistic goals, measure academic outcomes and establish key indicators of effective programming. Our driving principles include:

- Know what is reasonable and possible with youth, teacher, and family outcomes.
- Know what to look for in a quality program and how to evaluate it.
- Involve key stakeholders in the continuous improvement process.

As an added bonus, SCRI's in-house research and evaluation team helps districts design and implement customized academic and non-academic assessments.

3. Recruiting and Hiring Staff and Planning Professional Development

Because of their close connection to district partners across the country, SCRI/BX deeply understand the effort required to recruit, hire, and equip educators for success in summer learning—especially during COVID-19. We help to make this essential but time-intensive task simpler for ADSY districts by offering our proven hiring screener, interview questions and scoring rubric for use in their own hiring processes, along with draft job descriptions. Beyond offering these tools, we consult with districts to design a staffing model appropriate to their goals, including campus leadership, support staff, and instructors. Because staffing is the largest cost driver of summer learning programs, it is imperative to get it right.

Following quickly on the heels of staffing the program is planning for professional development (PD). The ADSY planning process encourages robust professional development for all program staff that goes beyond curriculum training to include modeling instructional strategies, building program culture, and practicing with all program materials and technology. SCRI/BX offered our to help districts plan PD that is:

- **Content focused:** Is the PD clearly focused on the discipline to be taught?
- **Active:** Does the PD provide authentic opportunities for participants to engage actively with the materials and the subject matter?
- **Collaborative:** Are there opportunities for staff to collaborate and share professional learning?
- **Developmental:** Is coaching available to provide expertise on evidence-based practices?
- **Sufficient:** Is there adequate time scheduled for teachers to learn, practice, implement, and reflect on their learning?

Spotlight — IDEA Public Schools: *IDEA Public Schools has a history of summer learning opportunities across its network. Typically, only the program leader received pre-service professional development leading into the summer program, but the ADSY program offered a unique opportunity to engage teachers as well. Starting with the program goals and vision, we worked with the IDEA program manager to complete the Professional Development Planning Tool and develop teacher-specific PD opportunities focused on curriculum, instruction, SEL, and how to create a unique and impactful summer learning experience.*

4. Targeting Student Enrollment

Making the most of summer includes identifying, recruiting, and enrolling the students who can benefit the most from the program. With specific experience in summer learning, SCRI/BX helps ADSY districts design realistic strategies to engage, recruit, and retain targeted students.

Spotlight — East Central ISD (ECISD): *ECISD identified several strategies to support effective student recruitment, including flyers, social media posts, campus level commercials, and personalized letters and phone calls from principals and teachers. Based on our experience, we're helping ECISD to implement a phased approach to recruitment to increase the likelihood that the children and families who most need summer learning register first, before registration is opened to the full campus communities.*

Beyond recruitment and enrollment, SCRI/BX supports districts to track student attendance and develop strategies to encourage, plan, and enable high attendance and retention rates. We help districts plan for incentives that work and avoid common scheduling pitfalls.

PLANNING FOR SEAMLESS OPERATIONS

Summer programs are over before you know it; hiccups in operations can easily derail a program. SCRI/BX offer districts a checklist of customizable operational tasks required to make a program run smoothly from day one. We help districts and schools answer key questions to get transportation, meals, supplies, and facilities management right so they can focus on the learning and the fun. Now, we also support districts and schools to operate smoothly across in-person, remote, and hybrid delivery models.

5. Building a Positive Program Climate and Culture

A consistently warm, welcoming environment is essential to creating a summer program that students want to attend every day. Such a positive culture and climate is built and nurtured purposefully by both staff and students. SCRI/BX's unique lens on program culture connects a program's goals for social and emotional learning and academic growth with its plans for professional development. Understanding how program culture and climate connect to social and emotional learning, staff hiring, and professional development ensures that staff are equipped to embrace the culture a program envisions.

Spotlight — Grand Prairie ISD (GPISD): *GPISD is committed to creating a fun, camp-like environment for its summer learning program. To support that goal, SCRI is working with the program team to modify the summer teacher job descriptions to include required behaviors and skills conducive to creating a positive climate for youth. We are also working with the curriculum sub-committee to ensure the program design reflects the desired culture. GPISD released a My CAMP commercial for teachers and families modeling the feel they anticipate for the camp, to help build excitement and buy-in to the culture they foresee.*

"We chose SCRI and BellXcel because we are busy district leaders who are trying to juggle multiple projects, and we needed to design and deliver a high-quality program while still managing our daily responsibilities. SCRI and BellXcel have been outstanding, results-based partners in planning our ADSY initiative. They have planned, coordinated, communicated, and partnered with our district leaders to keep the work moving forward, and they have provided many resources to help us bring our ideas to life. We expect to have a wonderful inaugural ADSY Program."
- Grand Prairie ISD

WHAT'S NEXT

Building on the success of the inaugural pilot year, TEA will launch applications for the next ADSY PEP cohort in Summer 2021. SCRI is looking forward to the opportunity to support new district partners in 2021 and 2022 as a part of the three-year pilot initiative